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PROPOSED PROGRAMME BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM 1996-1997

Revised estimates for the International Seabed Authority for 1996

Seventh report of the Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions

1. The Advisory Committee on Administrative and Budgetary Questions has considered the report of the Secretary-General relating to the revised estimates for the International Seabed Authority for 1996 (A/C.5/50/28). During its consideration of the report, the Advisory Committee met with representatives of the Secretary-General, who provided additional information.

2. As recalled in paragraph 2 of the Secretary-General's report, by its resolution 48/263 of 17 August 1994, the Assembly decided to fund the administrative expenses of the Authority until the end of the year following the year during which the agreement relating to the implementation of Part XI of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea entered into force.

3. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 4 of the Secretary-General's report that, as the agreement has not yet entered into force, the administrative expenses of the Authority in 1996 are still to be met through the budget of the United Nations.

4. The Advisory Committee also notes that the Council responsible for proposing candidates for the position of the Secretary-General of the Authority has not yet been established, and thus the election of the Secretary-General of the Authority has not taken place.

5. With regard to the entry into force of the agreement, the Advisory Committee recalls article 6 of the annex to General Assembly resolution 48/263, which states that the Agreement shall enter into force 30 days after the date on which 40 States have established their consent to be bound, provided that such

States include at least 7 pioneer investors and that at least 5 of those States are developed States. In this connection, the Advisory Committee was informed that, as of 27 November 1995, 41 States had ratified the agreement, out of which 3 States were pioneer investors (2 of which are developed States).

6. The Advisory Committee recalls and reiterates its comment in paragraph 4 of its report (A/49/7/Add.3) that, even though the procedures for review and approval of the budget by the Finance Committee, the Council and then the Assembly of the Seabed Authority are specific and involve action by Governments, as long as the budget of the International Seabed Authority is to be financed by the regular budget of the United Nations, the approval of the funding must be in accordance with Article 17 of the Charter of the United Nations, i.e., the budget of the Authority would have to be approved by the General Assembly after review by the Advisory Committee.

7. In paragraph 25 of his report, the Secretary-General indicates that the total budget of the Authority in 1996 amounts to $2,656,800; consisting of $1,318,900 for conference-servicing expenses and $1,337,900 for expenses of the secretariat.

8. As indicated in paragraph 26 of the Secretary-General's report, the estimated amount of $1,318,900 for conference-servicing expenses will be met from the resources to be appropriated under section 26 E of the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997. The Advisory Committee was informed that the meeting time may in fact be overstated by one week and that, depending on the length of the sessions, it may be possible to reduce the cost of conference services. A breakdown of the cost estimates based on the five- and four-week sessions is annexed hereto. The Advisory Committee expects that any savings will be reflected in the relevant performance report on the programme budget for 1996-1997.

9. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the number of official languages per session of the Finance Committee in table 1 of the Secretary-General's report would be six and not one.

10. As indicated in paragraph 46 of the Secretary-General's report, the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 retained the 1994-1995 appropriation of $776,000 as a resource base for 1996-1997, pending the submission of the budget of the Authority to the General Assembly at its fiftieth session. The Secretary-General is therefore requesting an additional appropriation of $561,900 under section 33.

11. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraphs 13 and 20 of his report that the Secretary-General has, when indicating the services to be performed by the interim secretariat, mentioned "administrative" as well as "substantive" services. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that the present estimates (see para. 7 above) related to the administrative expenses on staff and conference services of the Authority and not to its operational activities. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recommends that, in future, the budget presentation should be clarified so that it is consistent with General Assembly resolution 48/263.

12. The Advisory Committee notes from paragraph 28 of the Secretary-General's report that staff resources for the period from 1 January to 31 March 1996 are estimated at 14 posts (1 P-5, 2 P-2 and 11 local staff), the same number and level as those of the Kingston Office for the Law of the Sea. The Advisory Committee understands that this interim Secretariat will be assisted in a number of ways by the United Nations Secretariat in setting up an administrative structure. On the assumption that the Secretary-General of the Authority is elected in March 1996, the staff resources for the period from 1 April to 31 May 1996 are estimated at 16 posts (1 Under-Secretary-General, 2 P-5 and 13 local staff). For the period after 31 May 1996, the budget estimates provide for 23 posts (1 Under-Secretary-General, 1 D-2, 2 P-5, 2 P-2 and 17 local staff). In view of the functions to be performed, it is the opinion of the Advisory Committee that the number of local staff posts appears to be high. The Committee recommends that 14 local staff be approved for the period after 31 May 1996; the consequential reduction would be $29,700. The Advisory Committee was informed that United Nations standards were applied to the costing of posts.

13. Paragraph 31 of the Secretary-General's report makes provision of $54,400 under general temporary assistance. The Advisory Committee notes that the services to be supported under this estimate include additional secretaries, administrative assistants, research assistants, data and information assistants, library assistants and messengers. In this connection, the Advisory Committee recalls what it stated in its first report on the proposed programme budget for the biennium 1996-1997 1/ that, as a rule, general temporary assistance should be used for additional staff during peak workload period and for the replacement of staff on prolonged sick leave or maternity. The Advisory Committee trusts that the use of resources for general temporary assistance will be limited to purposes for which it was intended. Should there be a need for additional staff, they should be justified through specific requests.

14. Provision of $20,000 is made in paragraph 32 of the Secretary-General's report under consultants. Upon inquiry, the Advisory Committee was informed that, if the Secretary-General of the Authority is elected in March 1996, consultants will be necessary to assist the small interim secretariat in Kingston to prepare the budget of the Authority.

15. In paragraph 39 of the annex to the Secretary-General's report, provision is made of $18,000 under local transportation. In view of the fact that this item has appeared in a number of budget presentations, the Secretary-General is requested to come up with a policy on the issue. It is the view of the Advisory Committee, for example, that staff being assisted with transport should also make a contribution.

16. Taking into account its comments above, the Advisory Committee recommends approval of an additional appropriation of $532,200 under section 33 of the proposed programme budget for 1996-1997.

Notes

1/ Official Records of the General Assembly, Fiftieth Session, Supplement No. 7 (A/50/7), para. 68.

Annex

CONFERENCE-SERVICING ESTIMATES

	March 1996 (3 weeks)	August 1996 (2 weeks)	Total
A. Cost-estimates (for 5 weeks) (as per A/C.5/50/28)			
Pre-session documentation (ACEFRS)	33 000	67 200	100 500
Meeting servicing (ACEFRS)	573 300	451 800	1 025 100 a/
In-session documentation (ACEFRS)	35 500	89 000	124 500
Post-session documentation (ACEFRS)	34 000	34 800	68 800
Total	676 100	642 800	1 318 900

	March 1996 (2 weeks)	August 1996 (2 weeks)	Total
B. Cost estimates (for 4 weeks)			
Pre-session documentation (ACEFRS)	33 300	67 200	100 500
Meeting servicing (ACEFRS)	451 800	451 800	903 600 a/
In-session documentation (ACEFRS)	35 500	89 000	124 500
Post-session documentation (ACEFRS)	34 000	34 800	68 800
Total	554 600	642 800	1 197 400
C. Documentation (total number of pages) b/			
Pre-session	30	180	
In-session	120	240	
Post-session	60	90	

a/ Savings of approximately $121,500 would come from daily subsistence allowance and salaries of conference-servicing staff brought to the meeting site.

b/ There will be no change in documentation requirements even though the first session is shortened to a two-week period.